

TS# 185865-a

10 June 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: US OPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES IN VIETNAM

1. We take US objectives in Vietnam to be the reduction of Viet Cong insurgency to manageable levels and, as part of this, forcing the DRV to cease promoting that insurgency. More specific and limited objectives are dealt with in the following discussion of the particular options which appears to be open to the US under present circumstances. *

OPTION A

2. Course of Action: To continue with essentially our present course and objectives: that is, to bomb selected targets in the DRV (but not population centers, economic targets, SAM sites,

* We do not include the extreme courses of withdrawal on the one hand or invasion of the DRV on the other.

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and jet-capable airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area), and to build up US combat strength considerably in the South.

3. Objectives: To give the GVN/ARVN sufficient stiffening support to permit the reduction of the VC insurrection to manageable proportions; to lessen the DRV supporting increment to VC strength; and to cause DRV/VC leadership to cease or to tamp down the war, at least for some time.

4. Consequences: In our view, this will probably not permit us to impose our will on the enemy. The DRV would continue to reinforce the VC, and we doubt that US/ARVN forces could soon produce any decisive improvement in the military situation. The most likely results would be heavy US casualties, an over-emphasis on the military aspects of the conflict to the detriment of the political, and bogging-down of the war at higher levels of commitment and intensity, and, perhaps ultimately, a petering out of GVN/ARVN determination ~~and intensity.~~

OPTION B

5. Course of Action: To continue to increase US forces to the extent necessary to defeat the Viet Cong, to increase sharply ^{the} ~~our~~ weight

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of attack on the DRV, bombing virtually all targets; to impose a naval quarantine; to accept further difficulties with the USSR and the possibility of major hostilities with Communist China.

6. Objectives: Raised from those of a above, to compel the DRV to cease and desist in the South; to coerce Communist China into acquiescing in such a DRV decision lest it incur attacks on its own territory, perhaps including destruction of its nascent advanced weapons capability.

7. Consequences: This would risk convincing the Communists that the US intended to destroy the DRV regime and thus bring us close to the "flash-point" of Chinese Communist intervention. If they judged that the Hanoi regime was losing control of the country, they would probably enter the DRV unilaterally and might engage US air forces with their own.

OPTION C

8. Course of Action: To cease bombing in the North, to hold on in the South, and to seek to negotiate as good a Vietnam settlement as we can get.

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9. Objectives: To settle for a Laos-type "neutralist" solution -- guaranteed by other powers and by a continuing, but markedly lessened, US presence in South Vietnam -- on the grounds that we cannot, at an acceptable cost, "win" militarily or impose our will on Hanoi.

10. Consequences: US overtures for negotiation would probably be rejected and, the enemy, scenting a weakening in US determination, would probably fight on, while raising his terms. Also, a sudden US turning in this direction, without punishing the DRV above present levels, would have a seriously dispiriting effect upon non-Communists in Southeast Asia.

OPTION D

11. Course of Action: To increase our weight of attack on the DRV; to increase US forces up to the 70,000 man strength already authorized; and, most importantly, to place major stress on a program of political, social, and economic action in South Vietnam.

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12. Objectives: To prevent a collapse in South Vietnamese morale and military capabilities during the next few months; to accomplish certain improvements basic to the creation of a viable non-Communist state in the South, and, meanwhile, to keep open the preceding options.

13. Consequences: Though Option D also has its drawbacks, it has the following relative merits:

a. Heightened US pressure on North Vietnam would increase the difficulty of supporting the Viet Cong and make Hanoi pay an ever heavier price for continuing that support. Furthermore, it would demonstrate our willingness to accept heightened political risks.

b. It would involve the deployment of substantial US ground forces in the South -- a prime requirement for the immediate future. Further, it would not convey to the GVN/ARVN the notion that the US was taking over the war.

c. It would give the US time and opportunity to increase the civic action, political, paramilitary, local defense, and administrative improvements which are needed to create a viable non-Communist state in the South.

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d. The net effect of the foregoing would have some chance of persuading the DRV that time was no longer running their way and that they should move to negotiate.

e. The US would avoid the negative reactions abroad and at home which would be produced by all-out bombings of the DRV and ever-increasing US troop commitments.

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